



Nebraska Resources

Family History Sources in the Cornhusker State

Nebraska History

Nebraska, in many ways, is a transportation hub. The Platte River and its tributaries created natural east-west pathways through the region. The river valley made the area attractive to Native Americans, and, later, to the federal government.

Several Native American tribes claimed various parts of Nebraska, including the Kansas, Omaha, Oto, Pawnee and Lakota. They began to cede lands to the U.S. government in 1825, with large segments of the state being relinquished in 1854.

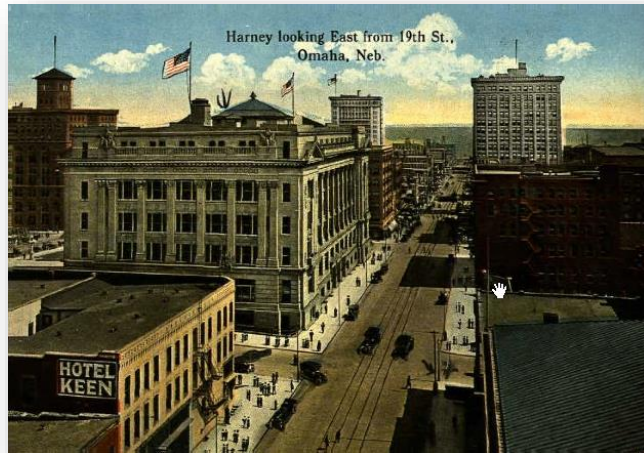
As Americans pushed west, dreams of a transcontinental railroad began to form. A route through Nebraska made sense; the topography was favorable and it was northern enough to be easily accessible from Chicago and St. Louis. The problem was creating a territory (and eventually a state) without upsetting the delicate balance of free vs. slave states. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act created the Kansas and Nebraska territories, which allowed "popular sovereignty" to decide the slavery issue. Nebraska stayed a free territory.

The Nebraska Territory was vast, and included parts of the current states of Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana.

The Union Pacific Railroad had its headquarters in Omaha. The First Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869 and followed the Platte River valley through Nebraska. In 1873, a railroad bridge over the Missouri River was completed, making the east-west trek even easier.

The population of Nebraska soared after the end of the Civil War. The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged settlement. Advances in agricultural technology made it easier to farm the tough prairie soil. The population of Nebraska almost quadrupled between 1870 and 1880; it more than doubled between 1880 and 1890. In this time period, waves of immigrants from Germany, Sweden, Russia, and Denmark came to Nebraska. Newly-freed blacks also looked to Nebraska for opportunities.

The term "cornhusker" pertaining to Nebraska didn't come into common use until around 1900. Since then, however, it has been borne with pride as a sign of a hard-working people.





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Nebraska Censuses

There are censuses of the Nebraska Territory for 1854, 1855, and 1856; indexes are available on Ancestry. Nebraska took a state census in 1885, which is also available on Ancestry. Many counties took their own censuses, often focusing on school-age children. Several of these have been published on Nebraska GenWeb and by various genealogical societies.

Nebraska is included in the surviving portion of the 1890 Special Schedule of Union Veterans and Widows.

Related Censuses Available on Ancestry.com:

- [Nebraska, Compiled Census Index, 1854-1870](#) (includes indexes to the 1854, 1855 and 1856 territorial censuses and the 1870 federal census)
- [Nebraska, State Census Collection, 1860-1885](#) (includes the 1885 state census as well as several earlier county censuses, mainly for Cass and Lancaster counties. The collection description contains the full list of the censuses that are included.)
- [Selected U.S. Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880](#) (includes the agriculture, industry, and social statistics schedule)
- [U.S. Federal Census – 1880 Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885](#) (includes 1860, 1870, 1880 and 1885 Nebraska schedules)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#)

<i>Population</i>	
1860	28,841
1870	122,993
1880	452,402
1890	1,062,656
1900	1,066,300
1910	1,192,214
1920	1,296,372
1930	1,377,963
1940	1,315,834
1950	1,325,510
1960	1,411,330
1970	1,483,493

Significant Dates (through 1970)

ca. 1600 – Native Americans returned to the Nebraska area after more than a century away; it is believed they were originally driven off the land due to drought.

1714 - Étienne de Veniard, Sieur de Bourgmont became the first European to reach the mouth of the Platte River.

1720 - Pedro de Villasur led an expedition through Nebraska on behalf of the Spanish government based in New Mexico. Pawnee and French traders massacred the expedition.

Early 1800s – Fur trade between Native Americans, Americans and Europeans increased.

1803 – Present-day Nebraska was acquired as part of the Louisiana Purchase.



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- 1814 – Manuel Lisa established a trading post north of Omaha.
- 1819 – United States established Fort Atkinson.
- 1835 – Moses and Eliza Wilcox Merrill, Baptist missionaries, built a mission near Bellevue.
- 1838 – Catholic priest Father Pierre Jean DeSmet arrived in Nebraska; he traveled extensively through Nebraska and the Great Plains.
- 1846 – Construction started on Fort Kearney at Table Creek. Due to its distance from the route most westward migrants were taking, Fort Kearney was relocated to Platte in 1848.
- 1854 – Nebraska Territory was created as part of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.
- 1854 – Treaties with the Omaha, Oto and Missouri tribes opened eastern Nebraska to white settlement.
- 1855 – Sally Bayne settled in Omaha; she is believed to be the first free black to settle in the state.
- 1857 – The Pawnee ceded their land between the Platte River and the South Dakota border.
- 1862 – The Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged settlement in the Great Plains.
- 1862 – The Union Pacific Railroad was incorporated, with its headquarters in Omaha.
- 1867 – Nebraska became a state on 1 March.
- 1869 – The University of Nebraska was chartered. It is the state's oldest university.
- 1872 – Nebraska Governor J. Sterling Morton declared the first Arbor Day; more than 1 million trees were planted in Nebraska.
- 1873 – The Battle of Massacre Canyon on 5 August was the last major battle between the Sioux and Pawnee.
- 1875 – The Lakota tribe ceded their land north of the North Platte River.
- 1884 – The Indian Industrial School at Genoa opened. It was in operation until 1934.
- 1904 – Birth and death records began.
- 1909 – Statewide marriage registration began.
- 1917 – Nebraska women were granted limited voting rights.
- 1919 – Race riots in Omaha result in the deaths of several, including the lynching of Will Brown.
- 1943 – First group of German POWs arrived at Fort Robinson.
- 1948 – Offutt Air Force Base became the headquarters of the Strategic Air Command.

Nebraska Vital Records

Nebraska began keeping civil birth and death records on the state level in 1904. With a few exceptions, such as the city of Omaha, births and deaths were not recorded on the county level. Counties recorded marriages; the records date back to the creation of that individual county. Statewide marriage registration began in 1909.

Nebraska Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Nebraska Marriages, 1856-1898](#)
- [Web: Nebraska, Find A Grave Index, 1854-2012](#)



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Other State Resources

- [Nebraska State Genealogical Society](#)
- [Nebraska State Historical Society](#)
 - [Library and Archives](#)
- [NEGenWeb](#)
- [American Historical Society of Germans from Russia](#)
- [Danish American Archive and Library](#)

Other Collections

- [Nebraska Resident Military Roster on June 1, 1891](#)
- [U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918](#)
- [U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)

Help and Advice

- [Nebraska Family History Research](#)
- [Nebraska County Resources](#)
- [Ethnic Groups of Nebraska](#) (includes a list of Native American tribes and which Indian Agency they were assigned to)
- [Map of Nebraska](#)

[View all Nebraska collections on Ancestry.com](#)

